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Forms as Individuals: Unity, Being and Cognition in Plato's Ideal Theory

RICHARD D. MOHR

This paper, building upon the unique-world argument of the *Timaeus*, interprets anew and makes coherent some central features of Plato's theory of Forms, in particular the sense in which each Form is one, the way in which cognitive access to Forms is a kind of acquaintance, and the sense in which Forms "really are."¹ The interpretation advanced might be descriptively dubbed "extreme monadism."

The position stated starkly is the following. What it is about each Form that constitutes it as the Form it is and as distinct from all others is not analyzable into relations and attributes. This claim is not that Forms have no relations to each other. The position is not a patently self-defeating monadism. There are relations between Forms and they are all necessary ones in consequence of the eternity of each Form. Relations between Forms and the phenomena come and go since the phenomena come and go. But relations between Forms cannot be other than they are. Some of these necessary relations are merely formal relations, like sameness, difference, and compatibility. But others are relations between the contents of Forms; one Form would not be what it is if another were not what it is. But relations between Forms do not constitute the core content of any

¹ The interpretation in general outline is intended to integrate with central tenets of the American unity school of Platonic scholarship—in a way that spares those tenets many recent critiques.

Form. No Form can be exhaustively reduced to, analyzed into, or derived from other Forms. This holds true of any Form regardless of its degree of specificity or generality. It applies to both the Idea of animal-in-general and the Idea of land-creature, both the Idea of element and the Idea of fire.²

Conversely, Plato seems to hold that the relations which Forms have among themselves are not entailed by what each Form is. This admittedly is highly counter-intuitive. One usually thinks, for instance, that one thing is different from another *entirely* by virtue of what each is. But Plato explicitly claims just the opposite, at least for merely formal relations. No Form is the same as or different than another because of what it is: "Each one [of the parts of the Form of difference, i.e., each and every Form] is different from the others not by reason of its own nature (*διὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν*) but because of its participation in the Form of difference" (*Sophist* 255e4–6). What a Form possesses of necessity, then, is sharply distinct from what it is to be the Form it is.

More importantly and surprisingly, each Form is not distinguished as the Form it is by virtue of possessing properties. Each is uniquely distinguished neither by the possession of a set of properties nor by the possession of some single, simple, unanalyzable property. Each Form is fundamentally an individual, not a thing qualified. As the Form it is, each is *τι* or *τὸῦτο*, not *ποιόν*. It is only in relation to a Form that *something else* has (or is) a quality, whether the something else is a Form, soul or phenomenon.³ Such qualities, however, neither singly nor in groups are constitutive of the core content of any Form, though they entirely exhaust the content of any phenomenon.

² So correctly, H. F. Cherniss, who notes the sharp distinction for Forms between necessity and "essence": "What Aristotle calls genus, differentia, and species are for [Plato] all distinct ideal units, each other than the others, each having aspects which imply the existence of the others or are compatible with them, but each being an independent nature which cannot be exhaustively analyzed into the others" (*The Riddle of the Early Academy* [Berkeley 1945], p. 54; see also more generally chapter one of Cherniss' *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Early Academy* I [Baltimore 1944]). The unique-world argument itself has sometimes been construed as a denial of this view. See, for example, R. E. Allen, *Plato's 'Euthyphro' and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (London 1970), p. 88, note 1. Against this denial, see R. D. Mohr, *The Platonic Cosmology* (Brill 1985), pp. 29–33.

³ In the case of phenomena, since they have the status of images of Ideas cast onto the mirror of Space, it is more accurate to say simply that they are qualities (or congeries of qualities) than that they are things which have qualities. Each is *τοιούτων* with no *τὸῦτο* (*Timaeus* 49c7–50b5).

I. Forms as Unique

These conclusions, especially regarding qualities, are consequences of Plato's claims in the unique-world argument (*Timaeus* 30c–31b) that both the Form of animal-in-general and the world as animal-in-general are unique and yet that the world is an instance or image of the Form. I assume that uniqueness in the argument is an external or metaphysical attribute of the Idea of animal, that is, that uniqueness is a property of the Idea *qua* Idea, rather than *qua* being the particular Idea it is.⁴ Further, I suggest that the Idea of animal is thought to be unique because it serves as a standard or measure. Plato twice gives an argument that each Form is unique by virtue of its status as a standard (*Republic* X. 597c, *Timaeus* 31a).⁵

Further, as standards, Forms are the fundamental individuals of the Platonic universe: everything else is dependent for its identification and intelligibility upon them. But they do not stand in this relation to anything. It is in this way, as self-sufficient, basic and independent, that the Idea of animal is repeatedly said to be complete in every way (*Timaeus* 30d2, 31b1), just as standards or measures in general are said to be complete (*Republic* VI. 504c1–3).⁶ The Idea of animal is not complete in the sense of being a whole of essential constitutive parts, a whole which is unique, if it exhaustively contains all the instances of some type.⁷ So Forms as standards turn out to be both fundamental individuals and fundamentally individuals.

Imagine the following scenario. Someone introduces Romulus to me, alleging that Romulus is an only child (*μονογενής*). Now if Remus is standing nearby, birth certificate in hand, I would be in a good position to say that the introducer was at least mistaken. If it further turned out that the introducer was fully familiar with Remus, say, by being his parent, then I also could reasonably claim that the introducer

⁴ So, Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism*, pp. 295–96 and David Keyt, "The Mad Craftsman of the *Timaeus*," *Philosophical Review* 80 (1971), 230–35. Those who take uniqueness as a property peculiar to the Idea of animal derive their interpretation from R. D. Hind, *The Timaeus of Plato* (London 1888), pp. 94–95; they include Richard Parry, "The Unique World of the *Timaeus*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 17 (1979), 1–10 and Richard Patterson, "The Unique Worlds of the *Timaeus*," *Phoenix* 35 (1981), 105–19, against which see Mohr, *Cosmology*, pp. 15–16.

⁵ See Mohr, *Cosmology*, pp. 24–26.

⁶ On this important but little discussed passage and on the completeness of Forms generally, see Mohr, *Cosmology*, pp. 33–36.

⁷ Parry and Patterson construe uniqueness in this way, that is, as exhaustive completeness (see note 4 *supra*). This sort of uniqueness, however, simply is not found in Plato's account of the way the world is unique in consequence of its animality (*Timaeus* 33b–37c).

either was crazy or was lying. If further the introducer, in self-defense, claims that Romulus is an only child *just exactly because* he is an identical twin to Remus, I would have to conclude that the introducer is not crazy, but is intentionally being perverse, hoping perhaps for a chuckle on my part.

Those numerous critics, who suppose that Forms have the properties of which they enable the recognition in other things, are committed, it seems to me, to viewing Plato in the unique-world argument as taking upon himself the same role as the introducer in this Roman scenario. For if the Idea of animal is such that, when it is copied, a formal similarity obtains between it and the world with respect to animality, and if both the Idea and the world are claimed to be unique each as being the sole possessor of animality-in-general and if this is claimed to be so as a direct result of the similarity of Idea and world, then Plato must be making a bad joke. For one cannot without contradiction claim that two formally identical things are each severally unique with respect to the very property they have in common, and further one cannot in all seriousness draw attention to the contradiction by claiming the two things are unique *because* they are formally identical. Since the unique-world argument and its surrounding pages are deadly serious, some way out of the Roman paradox needs to be found.

One way out, which will not work, is to claim that the Idea and its instance, though similar with respect to the very property of which allegedly each is the only possessor, possess it each in a different manner or in relation to some further distinguishing feature, such that each is unique in possessing the common property in some way the other does not. The Moon is unique in this way. It is unique not *qua* moon, but in relation to the Earth. It is the Earth's only moon. On this account, the Idea of animal will be the only animal-in-general which is an Idea and the world will be the only animal-in-general which is a phenomenal object. This way out will not work for it marks a retreat from the explicit and emphatic claim that the world is unique *because* it is like the Idea (*Timaeus* 31a8-b2).

The correct way out of the paradox is to recognize that Plato is using "unique" in two subtly but importantly distinct senses. The world is unique in the sense of being one in number and the only instance or possessor of its kind. Thus Plato calls the world *μονογενής* (*Timaeus* 31b3, 92c9), which here has its root sense "only begotten" (cf. *Critias* 113d2). Plato, however, crafts the unique-world argument carefully so that this term is not used to qualify the model. He uses rather the abstract coinage *μόνωσις* ("one-ness") to describe the uniqueness of the model (*Timaeus* 31b1). In part the choice is perhaps

governed by a desire to avoid associations of generation which attach to *μονογενής*. In part the choice is perhaps an attempt to signal a slight change of sense. However, because the term is a Platonic nonce-word, its sense, which eventually comes to mean "singularity by virtue of isolation or remoteness,"⁸ has to be gleaned from the argumentative context.

When the context is scrutinized carefully, it turns out that in ascribing uniqueness to the Ideas, Plato does not mean that each Idea is one in number and the only instance or possessor of its kind, but rather means that each Idea is one in number and the only one for its kind, the kind or common characteristic of which it makes possible the identification in its various instances. Each kind has but one thing which makes possible the determination that the things which possess the kind indeed do possess it. This one thing is the Form for that kind (so *Republic* X. 596a6–b4).

Within the unique-world argument the subargument showing that the Idea of animal is unique indeed establishes it as unique in the sense of being one-for-a-kind and not in the sense one-of-a-kind (*Timaeus* 31a4–7; cf. *Republic* X. 597c). Important results follow from this establishment. For the world can be unique in the sense of being one-of-a-kind, which is the only way in which an instance of a Form could be unique *qua* instance, and the world can be unique in this sense without, as it were, "competition," since the Idea of animal is no longer unique *in this sense*. But if the world alone is to have the status of being unique in the sense of being one of the kind it is (i.e., of-Animal),⁹ then the Idea of animal will necessarily not be of that kind. The Idea of animal, therefore, must be fundamentally an individual since it is numerically one, and yet is independent of being of a kind with respect to what it is. Though some things may be said of it (e.g., its external or metaphysical properties and its merely formal relations), its "essence" is not an attribute or quality.

Insofar as the uniqueness of the Idea of animal is an external or metaphysical property of the Idea, what the unique-world argument as a whole adds to Plato's arguments for the uniqueness of Forms is a commitment (sometimes read even as implied in those arguments)¹⁰ that each Form is not of the kind of which it allows the determination in other things. Forms are fundamentally individuals.

⁸ See *LSJ*⁹ s.v.

⁹ The kind is determined by multiple occurrences of an asymmetrical relation which individuals hold severally to a unique other individual, on analogy with the way in which all the particular sculptures and paintings of Churchill constitute a kind: of-Churchill.

¹⁰ For example, Cherniss, *Selected Papers* (Leiden 1977), pp. 332–34.

Plato then resolves the Roman paradox by using "unique" in subtly ambiguous ways when he ascribes it variously both to Idea and instance. Each *Ideá* is fundamentally an individual and is unique in the sense of being one for a kind; whereas the world is unique as being one of a kind, the only instance of its Form. This means, though, that Plato is neither crazy nor disingenuous in asserting that the world is similar to its Idea and yet that both world and Idea are unique.

II. Some Problems and their Resolutions

If Plato indeed construes Forms fundamentally as individuals, new problems may appear to crop up where old ones were resolved. For the implications of this view for his logic and epistemology will have a tendency at least initially to boggle the mind.

If it is asked, for example, in what way Forms for different kinds differ from each other, it turns out that no ordinary vocabulary exists in which to state the answer accurately. They are numerically distinct to be sure. But if what has been said about Forms so far is true, it is logically impossible to say that they are formally distinct. For they no longer are to be thought of as having properties with respect to what each is by means of which they might be formally distinguished. And yet they cannot simply be bare particulars capable of being interchanged without any subsequent effect. For they must be discernibly distinct in order to be each for its kind alone. So two features of the unique content of Forms may seem to be severally paradoxical and jointly contradictory: on the one hand, a Form's uniqueness cannot be analyzed in terms of its possession of properties, properties which might distinguish one Form from the next, and yet on the other hand, the various contents of Forms must be fundamentally individuals without, though, being merely fungible.

Some intuitive sense, however, can be made of these curious conditions if it is noted that they jointly apply to pre-theoretical understandings of the referents of mass nouns (gold, glass, water, flesh, wood). Aristotle is on the mark when he gives these, rather than the referents of count nouns (horses, trees, golf balls) as paradigm cases of matter—that of which predications are made. They are metaphysically distinct as that to which properties or forms attach, but are themselves neither simply properties nor form/matter composites. For each is distinctively a stuff. The referent of a count noun is not a stuff. A horse, a cow and a man are not three "stuffs" or three kinds of stuff. Aristotle is therefore off the mark with his doctrine of *relative* matters—the view that, for instance, gold is a

qualification of yet another matter, water, in the same way that a ring's shape is a qualification of its gold. On this view, "gold" would become a count noun and gold would cease to be a stuff—would lose its most distinctive metaphysical character. A form/matter or attribute/thing analysis applies neatly only to the referents of count nouns.

Indeed common understanding does not suppose that the referents of mass nouns are *things* which have properties that account for their various distinctive natures. Rather the properties which common understanding associates most closely or "essentially" with the referents of mass nouns are properly ascribed rather to things *other* than the referents themselves—things which, however, have the properties by virtue of the referents themselves serving loosely as standards for identifying the properties. Thus one says that water is wet, but really what one means by wet is that a wet thing is one that has water on it or in it in a way that can be felt. One uses water to identify things as wet. Or one says that water is drop-forming, but really what is meant when one calls something drop-forming is that it acts in air as water does. Or one says that water is life-giving, when what one really means is that for a non-artificial object, taking in water is required to maintain it as the kind of thing it is. So similarly stand to each other the items of the following couples: gold/golden, lead/leaden, flesh/fleshy.

On the other hand, everyday pre-theoretical, pre-Bohr understanding does not suppose that some deep, hidden, ultimately quantifiable structure or "genotype" is metaphysically lurking in the nature of things to guarantee and account for the unique natures of the referents of mass nouns.

Common understanding tends to view the referents of mass nouns as primitives. Water is a prime case. Once it is seen that the properties most closely associated with it are not what make it what it is but are consequences in other things of what it is, nothing is left to say about it in the language of properties that gets to the heart of what it is. And yet it is different than gold. The unique content of the referent of a mass noun is neither on the one hand analyzable into properties nor on the other merely a fungible particular. Something like this understanding of mass nouns as indicating primitive contents, I suggest, stands behind Plato's understanding of the unique contents of Forms.

It also stands behind his understanding of the necessary relations between contents of Forms. The descriptions in the late dialogues of relations between contents of Forms are elaborated almost entirely in terms of metaphors of artistic and natural production which apply

chiefly and in some cases exclusively to mass nouns: blending, pervading, cutting, purifying, intermingling, interweaving, harmonizing. These are metaphors of processes by which stuffs come to be related or distinguished and help explain how Plato can both maintain the view that the contents of Forms may necessarily entail each other and yet that no Form's content is exhaustively analyzable into that of other Forms.

The relations between contents of Forms may be viewed, as Plato's metaphors suggest, on an analogy with blendings which produce alloys. Brass would not be what it is if copper and zinc were not what they are, and yet one has not exhausted or even much clarified the nature of brass in saying that it is copper blended, pervaded, mixed or infused with zinc. Zinc and copper are not said of brass, nor brass of either of them. Neither of them is either a genus or a differentia of brass, and yet they, in the distinctive ways of stuffs, are as "essential" to it as anything might be. So too, I suggest, Plato views the contents of Forms as "blending" and standing to each other in the ways that the referents of mass nouns are distinctively interrelated. They may stand in relations of necessary entailments to each other and yet not constitute singly or in groups the "essence" of each other.¹¹

If Forms are unique individuals the contents of which are not distinguished by properties, then not only will Forms not be essentially described in Aristotelian definitions per genus and differentia but also the names of Forms will not even be disguised definite descriptions. For Forms are not what they are as the result of even partially being solutions to sets of conditions which might be treated discursively. If the names of Forms are names in any modern sense, they

¹¹ Besides the metaphors of blending, harmonizing and the like, Plato does use another set of metaphors to describe some relations between Forms: embracing and scattering—two metaphors which apply most aptly to the referents of count nouns rather than mass nouns. But, he uses these metaphors not to suggest substantial relations between Forms, that is, necessary relations of content by which one Form would not be what it is if another were not what it is. Rather the two metaphors are simply complementary ways of indicating merely formal relations of similarity: *x* encompasses, embraces or surrounds *y* and *z* if it is a Form of which they are instances, and *y* and *z* are scattered or dispersed if they have a formal identity between them by virtue of each participating in some one Form *x*. Thus, "are scattered" is equivalent to "participate in." Like the participation relation, the dispersion relation holds not only between one Form and others (e.g., *Sophist* 260b8) but also between a Form and its phenomenal instances (*Timaeus* 37a5, *Philebus* 15b5). Because similarity relations hold most clearly between the referents of count nouns, not mass nouns, Plato's use of the metaphors of encompassing and scattering to indicate such relations is well motivated and clever, since it allows him to hold in reserve his metaphors of blending to indicate substantial relations between Forms. On the encompassing relation, see Mohr, *Cosmology*, pp. 27–29.

are most like Russellian logically proper names, which pick out individuals as individuals from a field of immediate acquaintance. However, the invariably spatial determinations which provide the distinctness needed for "this" and "that" in ordinary deictic discourse are either completely inappropriate or hopelessly metaphoric when applied to the "field" of Ideas. It will be the content of each Idea showing forth itself as it is which constitutes the distinctness necessary for their being picked out by "this" and "that." Further, though names of Forms do not harbor descriptive elements, nevertheless, since each Idea has a peculiar content, the names of Forms may be used incorrectly. If one Form is called by a name, it will be incorrect to call any other Form by that name.

It is frequently objected that if Forms are fundamentally individuals and not primarily fulfillments of conditions or are not in some other way subjects of significant descriptions, but are simply given individuals which at best can merely be named rather than described, then they lose their explanatory power and so too their very reason for having been hypothesized in the first place, and so allegedly fail in their metaphysical and epistemological mission.¹² The answer to this charge is that the explanatory power of Forms as standards lies in their *relations* to other things. Standards allow us to describe and identify other things and insofar as standards form necessarily related clusters, they can explain causal relations among other things. In this regard, Plato is no more silly than Aristotle or any philosopher who wishes to claim that some principles of explanation must themselves be beyond explanation.

III. Acquaintance with Forms

It might be argued that, if Forms are fundamentally individuals and not essentially things qualified, then, even with possible problems of their causal inertness set aside, Platonic Forms will fail to be within the category of the cognizable on pretty much any theory of cognition which one might pick.

Since Aristotle's day, it has been hard to imagine that anything could be, or could be perceived as being, one without it also being one of some kind (*Physics* II, chapters 1–3, 7; *De Anima* II, chapter 12). However, some intuitive grasp can be had of what it is like to take in something as being one without having also to consider it as

¹² For instance, this charge of explanatory vacuousness has been leveled by J. M. E. Moravcsik, "Recollecting Plato's Theory of Forms," *Phronesis* supplementary volume II (1976), pp. 18–20.

one of some kind, a kind which is capable in theory of multiple instantiations, if it is acknowledged that something like this is how an individual recognizes non-reflexively other individual people as unique. One's immediate taking in of others is as their being each numerically one but not of some kind. Even if one is pressed into cataloguing a list of a person's accidental characteristics and quirks which are sufficiently diverse to apply collectively only to this person (gait, eye-color, gender, general location, sense of humor, pretensions, etc.), one would be chary of calling this compounded predicable a kind, even if the catalogued characteristics were jointly capable in theory of duplication. Humans tend to perceive even Romulus and Remus immediately as unique without appealing to their spatial distinctness or the order of their births. The reasons for humans first thinking of people as individuals rather than collocations of properties are complex, resting probably at the intersection of theology, sociology, biology and ethics. The point is only that people in fact do take in other people fundamentally as individuals. Perceiving or grasping Forms will be roughly analogous to the way one takes in people as individuals.

Platonic knowledge, as a kind of seeing or apprehending with "the mind's eye" (*Republic* VI. 508d4), will be strongly disanalogous then to Aristotelian perception or perception-like passive thought (*De Anima* II, chapter 12; III, chapter 4) in which processes the cognizer becomes formally identical with the object of cognition. A Form just as the Form it is has no qualitative nature with which to stand in a relation of formal identity to a perceiver. For it is a "this" (τοῦτο) with no essential "such" (τοιόν).

IV. The Third Man Argument

That the Ideas are fundamentally individuals rather than things qualified spares Plato's two-tiered ontology from entailing the vicious logical regress of the Third Man Argument (TMA).¹³ The unique-world argument helps pinpoint where Plato supposes the TMA goes awry when directed at his theory of Ideas. The TMA assumes that (a) any Form along with its instances can be taken as members of a set of which all the members severally but in common possess the attribute which makes the instances instances of the Form. The TMA further assumes that (b) since in accordance with good Platonic

¹³ For texts see *Parmenides* 132a1-b2 and 132d1-133a6; Aristotle's *On the Forms*, in Alexander (of Aphrodisias), *In Metaphysica commentaria*, ed. M. Hayduck (Commentaria in Aristotelem graeca, 1) (Berlin 1891), 84.21-85.11.

principles all attributions of properties to things are made by reference to some Form beyond the set of things which consists of members with a common property, there must be another Form over and above the first. Given (a) and (b), and if in addition (c) the new Form too is formally identical to the members of the earlier set, then there will be an infinite regress of Forms. The regress will be vicious because by virtue of (b) prior members of the regress presuppose (for their identification) posterior members of the sequence, of which there is no last member. Plato would reject (a) and *a fortiori* reject (c). He accepts (b). In the vocabulary of the recent critical tradition, (a) and (c) presuppose self-predication of Forms, that is, they assume that each Form possesses the same property it defines in other things. And (b) presupposes the non-identity of Form and instance, that is, it presupposes that a thing which possesses an attribute cannot be numerically identical with the Form by which one claims the thing has the attribute it has.

Those who suppose that Plato is committed to the TMA argument, in order to get the requisite premise (a) for the argument, must assume that in the unique-world argument Plato is reproducing the Roman paradox discussed above. They must claim that the Idea of animal and the world severally but in common possess the attribute "animal," so that Plato is being intentionally perverse in calling each unique because the two are so similar.

If Forms are fundamentally individuals and are not things which possess characteristics with respect to what each peculiarly is, Plato is clearly not committed to and indeed would deny premise (a) and its self-predication assumption. For one will not be able to make a mental review of a Form and its instances in such a way that it turns out that they are discovered to form a set the members of which each possess some formal identity with every other member.

V. The Really Real

If Forms are fundamentally individuals, a fairly precise account can be given of the Platonic sense of "to be" and of what Plato means when he says that each Form "really is" (*Republic* X. 597d2, *Philebus* 59d4, *Phaedrus* 247c7).

The sense of the Platonic "to be" has been extensively debated. Recently, the range of possible senses of "the Form of F is" has become saturated. Every possible sense of the Greek "to be" has been ascribed to the Platonic "to be." The possible senses of εἶναι are:

1. incomplete copula: "to be" = "to be F" (by far the most popular critical view; taken as the Platonic "to be" by G. Vlastos *et al.*).¹⁴
- 2a. complete first-order veridical: "to be" = "to be so," "to be as it is said to be," "to be the case" (i.e., "is the state of affairs which true propositions describe") (C. Kahn).¹⁵
- 2b. complete second-order veridical: "to be" = "to be true" (as applied to propositions) (G. Fine).¹⁶
3. complete existential: "to be" = "to exist" (old guard unitarian critics).¹⁷

If Forms are standards or more especially are fundamentally individuals, the Platonic "to be" will have to be a complete existential sense. The old guard unitarians are right on this matter. The Platonic "to be" is *some* sense of "to exist."

If Forms are not fundamentally (if at all) things qualified with respect to what each particularly is, then the Platonic "to be" as applied to the Form of F cannot mean "to be F;" and so *a fortiori* the distinctive way in which a Form is said to be, i.e., "completely" or "really" cannot mean "to be F *par excellence*," or "to be F to the greatest degree possible" [therefore, not I].

If Forms are fundamentally individuals then *a* Form by itself, though it is said "to be," does not constitute a state of affairs which can be captured in propositional form. So it does not seem that the Platonic "to be" is a first-order veridical sense ("to be the case"). Only a network or combination of Forms could be said to be in this sense. And it is clear that the Ideas as a whole are said to be because each individual Idea is said to be and not vice versa. In general the view that the Greek "to be" is a first-order veridical sense fails to

¹⁴ Gregory Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton 1973), pp. 42-57 and especially 58-75; Richard Ketchum, "Plato on Real Being," *American Philosophical Quarterly* (1980), 213-20; G. Santas, "The Form of the Good in Plato's *Republic*" in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy II*, ed. John P. Anton and Anthony Preus (Albany, NY 1983), pp. 232-63; and Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, "'Nothing' as 'Not-being': Some Literary Contexts that Bear on Plato" also in *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy II*, pp. 59-69.

¹⁵ Charles Kahn, "Some Philosophical Uses of 'to be' in Plato," *Phronesis* 26 (1981), 105-34.

¹⁶ Gail Fine, "Knowledge and Belief in *Republic V*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 (1978), pp. 121-39.

¹⁷ Frequently only implicitly assumed, but see for example, Cherniss, *Papers*, pp. 131-32 and Allen, "Participation and Predication in Plato's Middle Dialogues" in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. Allen (London 1965), pp. 57-58.

give full weight, or indeed any weight, to the role that unity plays in defining "being" at least in Parmenides and Plato¹⁸ [so, not 2a].

When it is claimed that the Platonic "to be" is a second-order veridical sense, which when taken together with the qualifiers "really" and "completely," is solely applicable to the Forms, what is meant is that *all* propositions which actually have a Form as their subject's referent will invariably be true (whereas some statements about a phenomenal object will be true, others false). But as with sense 2a, a Form just by itself, though it is, does not establish the truth of even a single proposition (regarding what it alone is) let alone establish the truth of a whole field of propositions [so, not 2b].

Forms, therefore, must be said "to be" in some complete existential sense. The Platonic "to be" is some sense of "to exist." However, if Forms are fundamentally individuals, the sense of "exist" here cannot be the post-Kantian sense in which "to exist" means "to be an instance of a concept" or "to be the value of a variable."¹⁹ If Forms are fundamentally individuals with respect to what each one is, then they are not even candidates for serving as things over which one may quantify. On this modern account of existence, the instances of Forms will exist, but Forms themselves will not. With respect to being the Form it is, each Form possesses no properties which can be cast as predicates in such a way that the Form's name may be said to provide a value for their variables.

Further, however one construes those among the Great Kinds in the *Sophist* which are dispersed to and said of all Forms (namely, Being, Sameness, Difference, and Rest), it is clear that Plato supposes Forms to exist because they participate in Being rather than because they can be values for bound variables of the predicates "same," "different," and "at rest" (*Sophist* 252a, 254d, 256a, e, 259a). Ironically, on my account Plato turns out not to be a Platonist, as "Platonist" is used in current discussions of number theory, wherein to be a Platonist is to be committed to quantifying over abstract entities.

Because the Platonic "to be" applies directly to individuals as individuals, it must mean something within the constellation of notions "to be actual," "to be substantial," "to be there in such a way as to provide an object to point at," and "to present itself." When the adverbial qualifications "really," "completely," or "purely" are at-

¹⁸ See Kahn, "Why Existence does not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 58 (1976), pp. 323-34.

¹⁹ For a denial that the modern sense of "to be" is the sense used by Greek philosophers generally, see Kahn, *ibid.*, pp. 323-25.

tached to this sense of "is," the compounded designation means "is this way (actual, self-presenting) *on its own or by virtue of itself*," or "is there to be picked out independently of its relations to anything." These adverbial qualifications are basically equivalent to the Platonic *καθ' αὐτό*, especially when it is contrasted with *πρός τι*.

The main engine for the opposing, most widely held view that the Platonic "to be" is a predicative sense—"to be F"—is the contention that an existential sense would be incompatible with Plato's various claims that different things may have different *degrees* of being or admit of *more or less* being (e.g., *Republic* V. 479c8–d1; VII. 515d1–3).²⁰ Only the predicative sense, so it is claimed, can properly capture the notion of different things being in different degrees, since only predicates (or at least some of them) pick out properties which can be manifest in varying degrees. Allegedly existence cannot admit of degrees, since "existence" is not a predicate. However, this allegation will be true only if "to exist" is construed in the modern sense as "to be an instance of a concept," "to be the referent of a subject of which predications are made" or more formally "to be the value of a bound variable." For admittedly a thing cannot partially be an instance of a concept. This is clearly the case with concepts like cow and seven. And even if one were tempted to claim that, say, a piece of cloth might partially instantiate red or some concept that admits of degrees, it would be more accurate to say simply that it is an instance or token of the type or shade it is, say, puce. And yet, if "to exist" is taken not in the modern sense, but as meaning "to be substantial (independently of its relations to anything else)" or "to be there on its own in such a way as to be pointed at" or the like, then its sense is completely compatible with *an* understanding of different things possessing different degrees of being—an understanding on which the various degrees need not form a *continuous* scale.

The telling example of this understanding for the Platonic metaphysics is the following. A shadow or an image in a mirror or a dream object will *be less* (real), in the requisite sense, than its original. And the original will *be fully* or *be completely* (real), again in the requisite sense. For its substantiality is not further dependent upon something else in the way the image is dependent upon it. And yet there is no continuous scale of degrees between the grade of existence of the image and that of its original. This account, then, of the Platonic "to be," which simply appeals to intuitions that stand behind some quite ordinary linguistic conventions concerning "being" and

²⁰ So Vlastos, pp. 60–63, 66, and especially Mourelatos, p. 65.

"real," captures better than does Vlastos' the central metaphor of original and image by which Plato chiefly conveys his metaphysics of Forms.²¹

Plato does not suppose that his talk of a thing admitting more or less of something else entails that the something else consists of a scale of *continuous* gradations. For in the *Statesman* Plato ranks number (i.e., integers) along with length, breadth and thickness (or swiftness) as examples of things that admit of more and less (284e) and yet he is as fully aware as Aristotle that numbers do not admit of continuous variation. Five fingers are not just sort of odd; they just are odd and not even a slight bit even or a slight bit six (*Phaedo* 103e–104b, 104d–105b, 105d, 106b–c, and especially *Cratylus* 432a–b). For Plato, being, like integers, may be manifest in non-continuous degrees.

Plato is a neo-Platonist to the extent that he thinks that being is sometimes a predicate; however, he fails to be a neo-Platonist in that he does not suppose that an examination of any two grades of being will always reveal some third intermediary grade.

This reading of the Platonic "to be" also accounts nicely for what Plato says about the sense in which things other than Forms *are*. The phenomena or objects of opinion exist on this account, but they do not "fully" or "really" exist (*Republic* V. 479c8–d1, cf. VII. 515d1–3; *Timaeus* 28a2–4, 52c4–5). They are there to be pointed at, but not by virtue of themselves. They are doubly dependent on other things. For their ability to shine forth, they depend both upon the Forms by virtue of which they are the images they are and upon the Receptacle or Space, which serves as a medium for their reception (*Timaeus* 52a–c).

In calling the Receptacle itself a "this," Plato seems to want to assign to it the same full reality which he assigns to the Forms (50a1–2, a7–b2). Plato's confessed trouble with designating clearly the mode of cognition of the Receptacle (52b1–2) then arises not because the Receptacle lacks qualities or attributes (50b–c, d–e, 51a7), but rather

²¹ Vlastos and Mourelatos simply mistake the implications of Plato's use of the image metaphor as a vehicle for explaining senses of "to be." They too hastily assimilate the metaphor to the predicative sense of "to be." Neither author gives any weight to or shows any awareness of Plato's exclusive use, as a vehicle for his ontology, of *non-substantial* images, ones that is which, like shadows, images in mirrors, and television pictures, but unlike photographs, sculptures, and paintings, require for their existence—their "being there"—the persistence both of their originals and of a medium in which they must appear. See Vlastos' analysis of the shadow images of *Republic* VII. 515d, pp. 61–62 and Mourelatos' analysis of dream and shadow images, p. 62. For a detailed look at the nature of non-substantial images and the implications of their use in Plato's exposition of his ontology, see E. N. Lee, "On the Metaphysics of the Image in Plato's *Timaeus*," *Monist* 50 (1966), pp. 341–68.

because, though it is a "this," it indeed does not shine forth or present itself. When one looks to it, one does not see it, one sees what is *in* it (52b3-5). When one points at it, one does so indirectly.

If this characterization of the existence of Forms is correct, the earlier account of their acquaintance is reinforced: the mode of cognition of Forms must be a form of unmediated acquaintance, operating on a rough analogy with the way in which without a moment's reflection and really without doubt one spots an individual or recognizes him as the individual he is.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign